

West Africa

Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo

Health Sector Needs Assessment

West Africa is characterized by high rates of infectious diseases which account for more than half of disease morbidity across the region. Communicable diseases include malaria, vaccine-preventable diseases, and diarrhoeal diseases including Shigellosis and cholera. West Africa is regularly affected by outbreaks of meningococcal meningitis, typhoid and yellow fever. HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections and tuberculosis are a rising concern. The cyclical Lassa fever outbreaks in Sierra Leone and in the border areas of the Mano River Union (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) are dangerous for the entire region: in 2004, the Ministries of Health of these three countries agreed to coordinate their efforts to control the disease.



The Meningitis Belt extends from Senegal to Ethiopia, where large epidemics of meningococcal meningitis occur. These epidemics, in varying patterns, used to occur in waves of three to four years during the dry season in a cycle of 10 to 12 years. Epidemiological data indicate that the magnitude and the frequency of the MM epidemics are changing and the intervals between epidemics are growing shorter. Moreover, data from recent studies suggest that meningitis epidemics may be extending south of the Sahel, which is consistent with environmental changes in the region.

The 2008 meningitis epidemic, though less severe than that of 2007, led to a reported total of 28 946 cases and 2712 deaths. Previous vaccinations and early detection and management of cases were not enough to limit the epidemic. This calls for strengthening regional and national reference laboratories as well as some sentinel laboratories, and better response and clinical diagnostic capacity in the most severely affected countries such as Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Mali and Niger.

HIV/AIDS remains a major concern. HIV/AIDS prevalence rates are over 10% in Côte d'Ivoire, 8.2% in Liberia, around 7% in Sierra Leone, 5% in Burkina Faso, 2.8% in Guinea and 2% in Mali. The presence of uniformed forces (including peacekeepers)

in some countries and the associated increase in commercial sex work may further aggravate the situation.

In most countries of West Africa the health status of the population remains well below minimum standards, and some have the worst health and socio-economic indicators in the world. Health systems are characterized by limited financial and human resources, weak planning and poor managerial capacities. Weak health systems tend to shrink around the centres, leaving large areas of the country – particularly border areas – with little or no access to health care. Lack of access and incomplete coverage by surveillance systems opens the way to wild and new pathogens. An example of this is Lassa fever in border areas between Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The effects of the food price crisis are also being felt. Countries have had to shift resources from other sectors, including basic social services such as health, to food expenditures. Families have had to adapt their expenditures to meet the rising costs of food, decreasing the quantity and quality of their food intake and leading to the following health consequences:

- reduced accessibility to basic health services by the population and subsequent increase in morbidity and mortality (less financial resources available for the public health sector);
- less access to preventive and curative services by households due to lack of financial resources needed to purchase these services as a result of cost recovery by governments, including reproductive health;
- deterioration of public health programmes because of re-allocation of government expenditure to other sectors, resulting in a rise in communicable diseases across the region and increased morbidity and mortality to endemic diseases and outbreaks;
- deterioration in the health status of patients with special dietary needs such as people living with HIV/AIDS, diabetics, and pregnant and lactating mothers;
- increased domestic violence, sexual exploitation of women, and sexual violence against women.

Health Sector Priorities for 2009

- Recruit and assign international staff in the region (Dakar) to support and reinforce health information management and provide strategic guidance;
- Set in place mechanisms for exchange of information, strategic planning and standardization of tools and protocols;
- Support ministries of health with weak capacities in countries at high risk from the food crisis;
- Contribute to the joint assessment of the current trend of main causes of ill health such as malnutrition, lassa fever, yellow fever, cholera, meningitis, malaria;
- Health system response to the food price crisis;
- Contribute to the assessment of the gap in health resources to meet the health needs of vulnerable groups – women, children, elderly, etc.;

- Subcontract local and international NGOs working in remote border districts to deliver essential and specific health packages for mental health, SGBV, HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria;
- Support national health services to strengthen existing services or establish emergency services on obstetric care;
- Support national authorities in the training of key health workers in primary health care;
- Support and contribute to the multi-antigen catch-up campaigns in the region and monitoring vaccination activities;
- Undertake continuous monitoring and joint missions at field level;
- Carry out studies and surveys at field level to evaluate the impact of humanitarian actions.

WHO Proposed Projects in the CAP 2009

Project titles	Requested funds *	Implementing partners
Coordinated health actions and health information management across West Africa WA-09//CSS/21933/122	915 350	MoHs, UNCTs, national and international NGOs and regional health entities
Nutrition for child survival in Togo WA-09/H/21194/122	200 000	NGOs, Togolese Red Cross, 3ASC, SAR Afrique, GAAIN
Response to cerebrospinal meningitis epidemic in Burkina Faso WA-09/H/21839/122	3 602 378	MoH, UNICEF, MSF, UNFPA, Red Cross, NGOs
Cholera outbreaks prevention and response among vulnerable populations in floods-affected areas in Burkina Faso WA-09/H/21841/122	989 292	MoH, MoSA, UNICEF, WFP, MSF, Red Cross
Emergency preparedness for vulnerable populations affected by commodity prices, cholera and meningitis epidemics in Niger WA-09/H/21894/122	1 885 000	MoPH, DHT, NGOs
Surveillance of nutritional status and reinforcement of case management of severe under-nutrition in Niger WA-09/H/21902/122	576 730	MoPH, WFP, UNICEF, NGOs
Improved accessibility of vulnerable populations to basic health services in Agadez region, Niger WA-09/H/21908/122	623 810	MoPH, NGOs
Integrated response to natural disasters in disaster-prone districts (Koinadugu, Pujehun, Bonthe and Western area) of Sierra Leone WA-09/H/21909/122	794 475	MoH, UNICEF and NGOs

Project titles	Requested funds *	Implementing partners
Reinforcing capacities of health structures to better respond to potential new crises victims afflux in Guinea WA-09/H/21919/122	588 500	MoPH, Guinean Red Cross, Hammer Forum, ASWAR
Timely response to cholera epidemics in Guinea Bissau WA-09/H/21921/122	669 713	MoH, UNICEF, IFRC, Guinean Red Cross, UNHCR
Improving hospital case management of acute severe malnutrition among under-five children in Haute Guinea and in Guinée forestière WA-09/H/21922/122	497 871	MoH, Guinean Red crest, Hammar Forum, local NGOs
Prevention and control of cholera and diarrheal diseases in Togo WA-09/H/21926/122	913 900	MoH, NGOs
Prevention and control of diseases outbreaks in flood affected areas in Liberia WA-09/H/21927/122	500 000	MoH, UNICEF, NGOs
Guinea Bissau. Improve cholera emergency preparedness for vulnerable populations affected by the prices crises WA-09/WS/21202/122	513 000	UNICEF, WHO, Red Cross, CREPA, MDM
Prevention and preparedness of cholera in communities most at risk and affected by commodity price increases in Guinea WA-09/WS/21241/122	481 000	Red Cross
Prevention and preparedness of cholera in populations most at risk and affected by commodity price increases in Senegal WA-09/H/WS21252/122	181 000	

* Amounts given in US dollars.

Total funds requested: US\$ 13 932 019